

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Democracy in Korea . . .

DEMOCRACY IS at work in South Korea in the most strenuous way. The opposition now controls the legislature and with it a new investigative capacity, which it is using to probe the suspected lavish misdeeds of its old nemesis, former president Chun Doo Hwan. The findings are having a devastating impact on Mr. Chun, who was forced to step down last February by massive public demonstrations. They are also deeply embarrassing to his successor as president, Roh Tae Woo, his longtime military comrade and political protégé, who had seemed to be doing fine—making Korea more democratic, holding the Olympics, maintaining economic momentum, staying close with the United States, appealing for reunification—until this truck came down the road.

Koreans, thinking in broad terms of the abuse of power, claim to see a resemblance to the American Watergate. But the Korean case is unquestionably graver. Mr. Chun, a military man, is accused of brutality, corruption and unlawful seizure of power. Hearings have been held—the witnesses include victims of army torture—into the most flagrant incident of his eight-year tenure, the army's suppression of a popular uprising in Kwangju in 1980 in which at least 200 civilians were killed. His relatives are being arrested; a brother has already been

sentenced to seven years for embezzlement. In the past the opposition said it would not press for criminal prosecution of Mr. Chun himself if he apologized fully, returned ill-gotten gains and accepted exile to his home town. But until now he has been resisting these conditions, and public calls to move against him are rising.

Pushing President Roh one way are whatever feeling of personal loyalty he may have to his erstwhile friend and patron and also the threats that Mr. Chun is making to tell dark secrets about his former colleagues. Pulling him the other way are pressures from the political arena to let the truth come out and, presumably, his notion of what is best for his country.

Looking hard at the past is something new to South Korea. There were always reasons or rulers to keep that painful task from being done. This year's transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, however, has changed the pattern. There is a passion to clear the air. It would be startling if some part of it were not of political origin, but another part seems to entail a deeper investment: to tell the truth so that bad things will not be done again. Mr. Chun is paying one sort of price, Mr. Roh another, for a searing exercise in democracy.

. . . And in Pakistan

PAKISTAN IS the latest country where military rulers have sponsored fair democratic elections to elect a civilian government. It is one of the more exciting global political developments of the 1980s, as important as the moving of human rights considerations to the center of things was in the 1970s. While neither of these developments is complete, the United States can take quiet satisfaction in being a principal patron of both of them.

There was in Pakistan, by all reports, a genuine and general exhilaration at the opportunity after 11 years to return to popular rule. Democratic elections do not merely legitimize political power and establish a country's international respectability, they confirm citizens' dignity. The time is past when military governments can be suffered as the best alternative available in difficult circumstances, let alone celebrated for their putative advantages. Everywhere the generals are on the defensive.

Not that in Pakistan they are gone from the political scene. The international and ethnic tensions hovering over and in Pakistan ensure that the military remains in the near background, politically discreet now but capable of asserting itself later.

Most politicians associated with former military ruler Zia ul-Haq were rejected at the polls. But 36-year-old Benazir Bhutto won the most seats (a plurality) and appears the likely choice to form a new government, and her elevation is sure to test the detachment of a Pakistani military that harbors abiding distrust for her late father, for his and now her party and for her populist inheritance. In the election period Miss Bhutto has been taking careful note of the military's sensitivities. But certain lines—they could turn out to be lines of agreement or lines of tension—are shaping up: on one side the duly elected prime minister governs while on the other the military presses to retain its lion's share of the budget, its nuclear enterprise and its control over Pakistan's assertive policy in Afghanistan.

The United States enjoyed the convenience of working with the old Pakistani military leadership in Afghanistan. But although the turbulence generated by the Afghan war has not yet come to an end, almost all Americans who think about it are bound to respect and support Pakistan's achievement in returning at least formally to the democratic fold.